

In Memoriam

STEPHEN BLEECKER LUCE

REAR ADMIRAL UNITED STATES NAVY

BORN 1827 DIED 1917

A TRIBUTE

BY

CASPAR F. GOODRICH

REAR ADMIRAL UNITED STATES NAVY



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Stephen B. Luce



Above the fireplace in my study hang the photographs of a number of old friends, many of whom, alas, have already crossed the Great Divide. Not a few of them were, in their day, eminent figures in history.

From his place in this little gallery of distinguished men, there looks down on me, as I write, an officer who has lately passed from our midst, full of years and honors after a lifetime unreservedly devoted to the service of his country; to the upholding of the Navy's best traditions, himself their completest embodiment; to the training of its youth; and to that development of the intellectual side of his profession through which the Navy acquired the broad vision and the skilled personnel that have rendered it so valuable during this War of the German Aggression, enabling it to act without friction to the achievement of decisive and carefully thought out strategic ends.

It is as impossible to exaggerate the Navy's indebtedness to the late Rear Admiral Stephen Bleecker Luce as it is to do justice to his work in a brief monograph. The utmost in the power of the writer is to touch here and there upon such points of an exceptional career as he is familiar with and to endeavor to depict the man himself as he appeared to one who loved and admired him. To disarm criticism it must be freely admitted that I write from the standpoint of warm affection and deepest professional veneration. I could not, if I would, be other than prejudiced in my judgments. In the appendix the principal events in Luce's life are given for the benefit of those who desire statistics rather than eulogy.

It is a strange commentary upon the course of recent history to recall the fact that Stephen B. Luce was a midshipman on the first expedition to Japan—that country which for centuries had been closed to the outside world and that this expedition, composed of the United States vessels of war *Columbus* and *Vincennes*, starting under the command of Commodore Nicholas Biddle in 1845, was refused admittance to that country and it was not until ten years later that the foot of a foreigner made an impress on the shore of Japan, when the second expedition under command of Commodore Perry was permitted to land. Luce, at this time, was the type of a gallant young naval officer as shown in an old daguerreotype of the date, and he kept this grace of figure and facial charm into his grand old age.

In fact, much as he was when Bunce painted his portrait for the Naval War College a dozen years ago, was Luce when he came to the Naval Academy at Newport, R. I., in 1862. The two score and odd years intervening between that time and his death in 1917 made but slight change in his lithe figure, his jaunty carriage, his inescapable air of alertness, mental and physical. A finely shaped head, flashing blue eyes, an aquiline nose, moustache and side whiskers a l'Anglaise—make up this hastily and roughly drawn pen portrait; but who shall describe the unmistakable air of the born commander of men or what record can replace the memory of that high pitched tenor voice, clear as a bell and far carrying, at whose call “Ready About! Stations for Stays!” we young midshipmen, on our practice cruises, jumped to the ropes and awaited “Rise Tacks and Sheets!” then “Mainsail Haul!” etc., as the good ship *Marion* tacked in a working breeze within Narragansett Bay or off Point Judith? Lucky were we to get our first lessons in seamanship under such a master, for Luce, so far as my experience goes, as a seaman had never a superior and but one possible rival—Alexander A. Semmes, who in 1869 took the sloop of war *Portsmouth*, with stun'-sails set both sides, into Rio Harbor, and made, in the eyes of the assembled fleets of six nations, a flying moor which is talked of to this day. Luce could have done this I am sure, but I was with Semmes when he actually did it.

There was no nonsense about Luce's teaching. It was all practical and to the point. Out of it grew “Luce's Seamanship,” a standard work for decades in the Navy and the merchant marine, where it was commonly called “The Sailor's Bible.” Gradually, as steam displaced the winds of heaven as the propelling force for ships, this volume began to assume the aspect of a treatise on a lost art, but the fundamental principles of ship handling and of what to do in cases of emergency remain dominant today just as he clarified and expressed them, so that later American books on Seamanship are merely the development of those principles in accordance with the changing conditions of nautical life.

It was of Luce's methods not to confine his instruction to mere routine where all goes well and as a matter of course, but to simulate the unusual or even the accidental. To this must be ascribed the Saturday afternoons spent by my colleagues and myself, not as precious holidays in town among our friends, but in carrying out anchors and heaving the *Marion* off the shoal upon which Luce had designedly grounded her. We grumbled heartily then, but I fancy there is not one of us who has not had occasion, in later years, to thank Luce for demonstrating practically how to get his ship out of a serious difficulty.

As his record shows, Luce was later identified with the apprentice system in which boys were trained to become seamen. To this especial duty he devoted four years of his life. That he further impressed upon

the lads under his charge high ideals of manliness, obedience and patriotism is well known to those cognizant of his labors, nor can it be questioned by any one who knew him.

The dignity of the commanding officer and the authority granted him by law were in Luce's eyes things to be defended at all costs no matter from what quarter came the attack. With him this view was not merely academic, rather was it a living force. Thus, when taking command of the *Hartford* in 1875, he was confronted by an order from the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting, under which came the affairs of the enlisted men, requiring commanding officers to submit for its previous approval their proposed ratings of petty officers. Luce blandly ignored this order that had no justification in the statute which distinctly made such an act part of the captain's duty and responsibility. He rated the men involved as he deemed best and reported the *fait accompli* to the Bureau as done under the law; confronted with which the Bureau was helpless to insist upon its own policy. Luce was not lacking in courage either physical or moral, as this bold move abundantly proves, for a Bureau in the Navy Department was and still is so extremely powerful as not to be lightly challenged.

Luce's interest in his profession was not confined to tacks and sheets, halliards and downhauls. It rose to a far higher plane and embraced all which science, art and history could contribute to a seaman's value. Paraphrasing the old Latin dictum, "Nothing nautical was foreign to him." He was one of the founders of our service forum, "The Naval Institute," to whose proceedings he contributed the initial paper, as well as many others on "Ancient Naval Warfare," "Fleets of the World," "Naval Administration," "Naval Warfare as a Science," etc., etc., all marked by comprehensive knowledge of his subject and clarity of expression.

He had, in conversation at least, long urged the establishment of an institution where the broad questions of strategy, tactics, naval history and international law might be dealt with, chiefly by officers of command rank. As he phrased it, "We have schools for everything in our profession except the one thing for which a Navy exists—Naval Warfare. It is time we founded such a school." The earliest printed argument of which I have knowledge occurs in a paper entitled "War Schools," read before the Newport Branch of the Naval Institute, April 4, 1883, in which he says:

"It is the part of the naval student to prepare himself by study and reflection for those higher duties of his profession; and the only way to do that is to study the science of war . . . and then to apply the principles to the military operations conducted at sea. He should be led into a philosophic study of naval history, that he may be enabled to exam-

ine the great naval battles of the world with the cold eye of professional criticism, and to recognize where the principles of the science have been illustrated, or where a disregard for the accepted rules of the art of war has led to defeat and disaster. Such studies might well occupy the very best thoughts of the naval officer, for they belong to the very highest branch of his profession."

His persistent advocacy of a Naval War College converted the late Rear Admiral John G. Walker, U. S. N., then chief of the Bureau of Navigation, to acceptance and loyal support of Luce's idea. A Board was appointed to consider the scheme and to map out a plan for its organization and conduct. Luce was the senior member; Sampson was associated with him and I brought up the rear as junior and working member. Our report was adopted and the Naval War College, with Luce as its President,—the first of its kind in any country of the world—was created.

With the opposition it encountered and with its precarious early existence, this tribute to Luce's memory has no concern. The infant survived despite of all, grew into sturdy manhood, great influence and unsurpassed usefulness, justifying all which Luce predicted of it and remaining to this day, as for all time, a noble and enduring monument to his memory.

It was but natural that Luce should, later, identify himself with the movement which led to the forming of the Naval History Society and to which he lent the ripe fruits of his experience and wisdom. Of our Society he was one of the incorporators. His name gave additional prestige to the project of the late Captain John S. Barnes and his associates. The Society recognizes its indebtedness to Luce's sympathy and services and mourns the loss of a member whose wide acquaintance with things nautical and profound knowledge of naval history, can only with the greatest difficulty ever be replaced, if at all. Happy the country which can produce even one Luce in a generation.

CASPAR F. GOODRICH.

SUMMARY OF NAVAL RECORD

of

STEPHEN B. LUCE, U.S.N.

Stephen B. Luce was born in New York, March 25, 1827, and served in the United States Navy as follows:

1841	Oct. 19	Appointed Midshipman from the State of New York.
1841	Nov. 4	To Receiving Ship at New York.
1842	Apr. 2	To the <i>Congress</i> .
1843	May 3	Warranted.
1845	Mar. 14	Detached and leave three months.
1845	May 26	To the <i>Columbus</i> .
1845		Went on the first Expedition to Japan under Commodore Nicholas Biddle.
1848	Mar. 6	Detached from <i>Columbus</i> and to School, 20th instant.
1848	Mar. 24	Delay reporting at School till 1st of April.
1848	June 22	Detached leave till 10th October and then return.
1849	Aug. 20	Detached and to the <i>Vandalia</i> .
1849	Sept. 29	Warranted as Passed Midshipman from 10th of August, 1847. (No. 126.)
1852	Oct. 12	Detached and three months' leave.
1852	Dec. 31	To duty connected with Lieutenant Gillis, Astronomical Expedition.
1853	May 9	Detached and to the <i>Vixen</i> .
1854	Feb. 4	Detached and leave three months.
1854	May 18	To Coast Survey schooner <i>Madison</i> .
1854	June 8	Appointed Acting Master Survey schooner <i>Madison</i> .
1855	June 19	Transferred to Lieutenant Moffitt's party as Acting Master Tender.
1855	Nov. 9	Warranted as Master from 15th September, 1855.
1855	Sept. 16	Promoted to Lieutenant.
1860	Feb. 11	Detached and three months leave.
1860	Mar. 2	To the Naval Academy.
1861	May 2	Detached and to the <i>Wabash</i> .
1862	Mar. 14	Re-commissioned from 15th September, 1855, to rank next after Lieutenant Thomas C. Harris.
1862	June 9	Detached from <i>Wabash</i> (went to Naval Academy).
1862	Aug. 5	Promoted to Lieutenant Commander.
1863	Apr. 18	Commissioned from 16th July, 1862.
1863	Sept. 24	Be ready for sea service.
1863	Oct. 13	Detached from Academy and to command the <i>Nantucket</i> .
1865	June 9	Detached from the <i>Pontiac</i> and wait orders. (No record of reporting on this vessel.)
1865	Sept. 22	To the Naval Academy.
1865	Oct. 6	Commandant of Midshipmen.
1866	July 25	Promoted to Commander.
1866	Aug. 7	Commissioned.
1868	Aug. 29	Detached from the Naval Academy, 30th September, and to command the <i>Mohongo</i> per str. 16th October. (Took command 10th November, 1868.)
1869	Apr. 1	Detached, return and report.
1869	June 10	Detached 26th ultimo and wait orders from 7th instant.
1869	June 18	To command the <i>Juniata</i> , 1st July.

1872	July 1	Detached and wait orders.
1872	Aug. 16	To equipment duty, Navy Yard, Boston, 14th September.
1872	Dec. 10	To examination.
1872	Dec. 28	Promoted to Captain.
1873	Apr. 1	Member of Board of Examiners, Naval Academy.
1873	May 15	Commissioned.
1873	Nov. 19	Detached as Member of Board and resume duties at Boston Yard.
1873	Nov. 29	Be ready to command the <i>Minnesota</i> .
1873	Dec. 12	Detached and to command the <i>Minnesota</i> , 22nd instant.
1873	Dec. 22	Detached and resume duties at Boston Yard.
1874	Sept. 29	Captain of Navy Yard, Boston.
1875	Sept. 4	Detached 15th October, and wait orders.
1875	Oct. 27	To command the <i>Hartford</i> , 1st November.
1877	Aug. 10	Detached 21st instant, and leave one month.
1877	Aug. 25	To special duty inspecting training ships.
1877	Sept. 17	Inspect <i>Supply</i> and then wait orders.
1877	Sept. 24	To temporary duty in connection with Training Ships.
1877	Dec. 1	Detached 31st instant and to command the Training Ship <i>Minnesota</i> 1st January.
1881	Jan. 28	Detached 15th February and wait orders.
1881	Apr. 11	Take command of all the apprentice ships to be assembled at Washington 25th instant.
1881	Nov. 17	To physical examination.
1881	Nov. 17	To examination.
1881	Nov. 25	Promoted to Commodore.
1882	Jan. 14	Commissioned.
1884	June 21	Detached 30th instant.
1884	July 16	Detached from special duty 26th instant, and to command North Atlantic Station 27th instant.
1884	July 22	Detached 25th instant and take command on the 26th instant.
1884	July 23	Appointed Acting Rear Admiral.
1884	Sept. 14	Detached 20th instant and assume duties of Superintendent of Naval War College at Coasters Harbor Island, R. I.
1885	Sept. 28	To examination.
1885	Oct. 5	Promoted to Rear Admiral.
1886	Jan. 30	Commissioned.
1886	June 18	Detached and to command the North Atlantic Station.
1889	Jan. 28	Detached upon receipt of this order, return home and wait orders. (Relieved 16th February, 1899.)
1889	Mar. 20	Will be transferred to the Retired List on the 25th instant.
1893	May 27	Leave one year, with permission to leave the United States.
1901	Jan. 3	Appointed member of Board of Visitors, Naval Academy.
1901	Feb. 14	Member Board on Awards. Office Assistant Secretary, 18th instant.
1901	Mar. 7	Leave from March 16th to May 15th, or abroad.
1901	May 6	To Office Secretary, May 8th, Washington.
1910	Nov. 15	Detached November 20th, home and report. (Home 20th November.)
1917	July 28	Died at Newport, R. I., July 28th, 1917, of arteric sclerosis myocarditis and buried at Portsmouth R. I.

